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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 5630  
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE  
RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE  
RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN 0291  
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 0337  
RUEHSA/AMEMBASSY PRETORIA 0487  
RUEHBAD/AMCONSUL PERTH 0301  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC  
RHMFISS/CDR USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NOUAKCHOTT 000778

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [EAID](#) [KPAO](#) [MR](#)

SUBJECT: SUBJECT: STRONG "YES" VOTE LIMITING POWER OF  
PRESIDENT EXPECTED

REF: A. NOUAKCHOTT 764

[1](#)B. NOUAKCHOTT 695

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Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOSEPH LEBARON, REASON 1.4 (B), (D)

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(C) Key Points  
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-- Nearly everyone here expects the constitutional amendments curbing important powers of the presidency to pass easily in this Sunday's national referendum.

-- For the first time, Mauritania's constitution will put a limit on the length of time a president can serve: two five-year terms.

-- Almost all major political parties and coalitions have called for a "YES" vote. Voter turnout is expected to be much higher than it typically is for a referendum, but much lower than the turnout for a presidential election.

-- Over 20 Embassy employees will participate as international observers of the voting in the capital and elsewhere. No violence or significant disturbances are expected.

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(C) Comments  
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-- The referendum is the first in a series of critically important elections, designed by the Mauritaniens, themselves, to usher their country into a new, democratic, chapter in its short 45-year history as an independent state.

-- The UN evaluation team, here, to help observe the referendum, will almost certainly determine that the referendum meets international electoral standards.

-- But, preparations for a free and fair referendum have been

far from trouble-free. The transitional government, on one occasion, seized anti-referendum campaign materials. It also recently arrested several former high-ranking military officers and civilians associated with former President Taya, alleging that they were secretly planning to disrupt the referendum (see Ref A).

-- These actions highlight the fragility of the democratization process here. At any point in the period leading up to the presidential election next March -- and beyond -- Mauritania's historic transition to democracy could get waylaid by coup, assassination, or a change of intent by the junta. But, on the whole, so far, so good.

End Key Points and Comments.

¶1. (U) Colonel Fal opened the official campaign period for the Constitutional Referendum with a speech, in the Capital city of Nouakchott, June 10. In the speech, Fal focused on the important role of women and youth, and urged all Mauritians to unite in support of the June 25 Referendum and abandon "useless sectarianism" that has divided Mauritians in the past. The proposed constitutional amendments include a five-year presidential term of office with a maximum of two terms for any one president.

¶2. (U) Mauritanian electoral law restricts electoral campaigns to the 15 days preceding an election, and the political parties have been scrambling to participate in what several have described as Mauritania's first "free election."

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CAMPAIGNS  
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¶3. (C) Nearly all Mauritians believe the Referendum will pass by a large margin. Consequently, many political parties view their Referendum campaigns as a dry run for the Municipal and Presidential elections (scheduled for November

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'06 and March '07), rather than a sincere effort to influence the Referendum's outcome. That said, several parties have tried to use their support or opposition for the Referendum to attract new members and gain national recognition.

¶4. (C) Nearly all major parties have held rallies and press conferences for the Referendum, and have taken advantage of the free advertising space in newspapers and on the radio and television. This space has been organized by the Ministry of the Interior, the National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI), and the UNDP Electoral Assistance Team, with funding coming from the UNDP Basket Fund.

¶5. (C) While parties have been campaigning, confidence in the Referendum's outcome and a lack of funding have resulted in a fairly quiet run-up to elections. Occasional campaign signs can be seen around Nouakchott, and political rallies, held mostly in street tents during the weekends, draw between 50 and 100 people for hour-long sessions.

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SUPPORT FOR THE REFERENDUM  
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¶6. (C) Only one of Mauritania's 35 recognized political parties (Party of the Third Generation (PTG)) has come out against the Referendum, while a coalition of four other parties (the Bloc for Change, which includes PLEJ, PTM, AJD, and PMDE) has called for a boycott. All other major parties, including former President Taya's PRDR party, have called for a "YES" vote.

¶7. (C) Representatives from the Bloc for Change told Ambassador on June 20 that the coalition would boycott the Referendum because the proposed amendments did not go far

enough to readdress social inequalities, including slavery. Coalition representatives said they would continue their call for a boycott of the referendum despite the recent arrests of high-ranking military officers and civilians associated with former President Taya (ref A). They said they had sent a letter to the Minister of Interior protesting the arrests, saying they were not based on concrete evidence and amounted to intimidation. Further, they protested the government's campaign for a "YES" vote on the referendum as being counter to its promise to remain neutral in the elections.

18. (C) In a positive sign of growing press freedom, the government's official newspaper has thus far published all political party statements received, including those calling for a boycott and a "NO" vote for the Referendum. However, this positive step followed a police raid of PTG's headquarters and the seizure of their campaign material, under the assertion that PTG had been illegally campaigning prior to the June 10 campaign start date. Embassy Note: PTG had been campaigning prior to June 10, but so had other parties. PTG, which was opposing the Referendum, was the only party the police went after. End Note.

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FUNDING FOR POLITICAL PARTIES  
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19. (C) The government has not yet announced a plan for the public financing of political party campaigns, nor have they responded to a funding proposal signed by 28 of Mauritania's parties and submitted to the Ministry of the Interior in May (ref B). Political parties remain highly concerned about this issue, and fearful the government will not provide the promised funding.

-LeBaron  
LeBaron